



2025–26 Victorian State Budget Response

Connection to jobs and families a worthy investment

This year’s Victorian State Budget contains welcome investments that extend existing employment services for people in prison and lock in the lower cost of phone calls from prison announced earlier this year. **These are worthy investments that will help people stay connected with family while in prison and gain employment when they are released.** However, they pale in comparison to the \$737 million that has been injected into the corrections system to open more cells and units, and recruit more staff to cope with the expected increase in the remand population.

We should not be expanding the prison system. This demand has been created by unnecessary changes to Victoria’s bail regime which were a response to media and political pressure for a punitive response that has been proven not to work time and time again. This money – nearly three quarters of a billion dollars – will fund short periods of remand for people who have not yet been (and may never be) convicted of a crime. **Short-term incarceration on remand is one of the most harmful types of interaction with the criminal justice system.** People who can be supported to desist from crime in their communities are torn away without notice from their families, jobs, housing, and other supports. They are incarcerated with very limited access to programs or services, and then inevitably released with even fewer protective factors than they had before: often their job has been removed or their lease has been cancelled, their relationships have fractured under the strain of imprisonment, and their health has worsened while in custody.

Our small hope is that this massive injection of funding into the corrections system will uplift desperately needed funding for programs and services. For example, Corrections Victoria must now ensure that any program required for parole eligibility is available to every person, in every prison, within the requisite time frame. Similarly, departmental performance targets such as out of cell hours, participation in education, and other service agreement benchmark measures, all of which have been unmet for years, must now be consistently met.

‘Community safety’ requires community funding

The Budget’s headline ‘community safety’ initiatives **fund cameras, cops, courts, and corrections – but it is harder to find funding for community programs that are proven to prevent crime.** Despite a great deal of media panic about a small group of young people who allegedly offend repeatedly in a small number of communities, just \$1.9 million per year for two years is set aside

for community-based youth services proven to help kids move away from offending and towards a brighter future.

Money for cameras, cops, courts, and corrections cannot be considered funding for prevention. **'Preventing crime in the community' means investing heavily in community-based social services** which work locally to connect people at risk of getting caught up in the justice system with the supports they need to create new beginnings and thrive in their communities.

Well-resourced, joined-up, community-based youth, family, mental health, AOD, housing, diversion, and reintegration services are the real solution to crime and community safety issues. **We call on the Victorian Government to reimagine its approach to crime prevention in consultation with these community services instead of continuing to expand systems of surveillance and punishment.**

Quote attributable to Marius Smith, CEO

"While we welcome continued funding for employment support and cheaper phone calls from prison, this budget locks in the unnecessary changes to Victoria's bail regime, even though this response has been proven not to work time and time again. Many more Victorians will be remanded into custody. That means being removed from their lives at a moment's notice and imprisoned without being tried or convicted of a crime. When they are released, their job is often gone, they've lost their lease and their relationships with loved ones are more strained. Instead, the Victorian Government needs to reimagine its approach to crime prevention by designing and funding well-resourced, joined-up, community-based services that are the real solution to crime prevention and community safety."

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